

CRITICAL APPRAISAL SKILLS PROGRAMME

Making sense of evidence about clinical effectiveness



10 questions to help you make sense of qualitative research

These questions consider the following:

Are the results of the review valid?

What are the results?

Will the results help locally?

A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. There will not be time in the small groups to answer them all in detail!

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Screening Questions

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Consider:

- *What the goal of the research was*
- *Why is it important*
- *Its relevance*

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Consider:

- *If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants*

Detailed questions

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Consider:

- *If the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)?*

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Consider:

- *If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected*
- *If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study*
- *If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)*

5. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Consider:

- *If the setting for data collection was justified*
- *If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)*
- *If the researcher has justified the methods chosen*
- *If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews were conducted, or did they use a topic guide)?*
- *If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why?*
- *If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)*
- *If the researcher has discussed saturation of data*

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Consider:

- *If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during:*
 - *Formulation of the research questions*
 - *Data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location*
- *How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design*

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Consider:

- *If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained*
- *If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)*
- *If approval has been sought from the ethics committee*

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Consider:

- *If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process*
- *If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?*
- *Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process*
- *If sufficient data are presented to support the findings*
- *To what extent contradictory data are taken into account*
- *Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation*

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Consider:

- *If the findings are explicit*
- *If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments*
- *If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)*
- *If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question*

10. How valuable is the research?

Consider:

- *If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature?*
- *If they identify new areas where research is necessary*
- *If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used*

